

Those who proclaim Jesus are called to serve, and those who serve proclaim Jesus

Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo

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Ordination of Deacons
St. Mary's Cathedral
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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, this is a joyful day for the Church. It is a moment of grace and joy for each of us, and especially for our brothers who are to be ordained deacons this evening.

The deacon has a special closeness to our Lord Jesus, because he is called to serve. Just last week, Pope Francis addressed a great gathering of deacons and said, "Those who proclaim Jesus are called to serve, and those who serve proclaim Jesus." The Lord was the first to show us this. He, who is the word of the Father, who brought us the Good News, who is the Good News, became our servant. He came "not to be served but to serve." He became the diakonos, the servant of all.

And now, these men, who are to be ordained as deacons, are called to do as he did. They are called to be good and faithful servants to all, in imitation of Christ who has chosen them. But how do you become the "good and faithful servants" that our Lord calls you to be? As Pope Francis tells us, you must be available in life, meek and humble of heart, and in constant dialogue with Jesus.

Dear sons, your availability to the people of God will be a sign of your service, your willingness to put aside your own desires in order to be a servant to others. In a world that prizes absolute autonomy and control, our Lord calls you to give your life and your will into his hands, so that he may employ you as his instruments of mercy. Every day, a servant learns greater detachment from having things his own way so he might become more generous with the gift of his life, and more fruitful in his efforts for the Lord.

A servant is also meek and humble of heart. He looks to the need of others before his own and is ready to give of himself. He desires only to give glory to God and to seek the advancement of his kingdom. As ministers of the Word of God, you will faithfully proclaim the saving truth of the Gospel, handing on the riches of our faith in all its fullness. By your service at the altar, you will prepare the Sacrifice of Christ and help to distribute the Lord's Body and Blood to the faithful. And as a man of charity, you will truly be a servant to all those in need of God's love and mercy. Today, in the midst of the Jubilee of Mercy, the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, who was indeed meek and humble of heart. Like Jesus himself, you must reach out in mercy and love to seek those who are distant or lost, those who do not know the love of God.

And a true servant is in constant dialogue with Jesus. As you strive to become a true servant, you must conform your heart to the heart of Jesus. Listen for the sound of his voice and

come to him in prayer. Open your heart to his mercy so that you might offer mercy to others. Let him heal your own sinfulness so you can proclaim the Good News of forgiveness to those still in need of healing. And the more we dwell in the heart of our Lord, the more we will share in his joy and give witness to that joy for our brothers and sisters. Be always attentive to the presence of God in your life so that you might lead others to his merciful heart.

My sons, you will also join yourselves to Christ in the celibate state, which is a sign of our Lord's own pastoral charity. The call to celibacy is a call to generosity, a call to spiritual fruitfulness in the world. Moved by your sincere love and dedication to Jesus and his Church, you will join your hearts more completely to his. You will be free for the service of God and his people, and you will become a sign to the world of selfless love and the desire for heaven. Be rooted and grounded in faith so that you might always be chaste and beyond reproach before God and his people.

You now join the ranks of those holy deacons who gave themselves in service to Christ and his Church through the ages. Stephen, the first martyr, who mirrored the love and mercy of Jesus in the earliest days of the Church. Lawrence, the man of charity, who was called upon to attend to the needs of the poor, and recognized them as the true treasure of the Church. Francis, the apostolic man who has turned the attention of people everywhere toward God the Father and his incarnate Son. These and so many others were in their own ways servants of Christ, and now you too must render a similar service. Early in his pontificate, Pope Francis identified authority in the Church with service, service given to Christ and to his people, service that is built on love. And last week he told us that, "Serving is the only way to be a disciple of Jesus."

So, my sons, united with the heart of Jesus, may you always have the heart of a servant. Hold fast always to the hope offered by the Gospel. From now on, you are not only hearers of this Gospel but you are also its ministers. By the witness of your actions, may you live the Word of God that your lips proclaim, so that God's people, given life by the Spirit, might become a pure offering acceptable to God. Then on the last day, when you go out to meet the Lord you will be able to hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord."